

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Fife Keith-Strathisla-Mill of Towie Loop (Moray)

Route Summary

At just over 10 km, this is a fine half-day tour around the valley ("Strath") of the River Isla near Keith. The walk takes in places of historical interest, and follows an old turnpike road for some of the route. There are good views of rolling farmland and surrounding hills.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Frequent Stagecoach bus and Scotrail train services pass through Keith. Check timetables. Free parking in Regent Square at the start/end of the walk.

Length: 11.240 km / 7.03 mi

Height Gain: 206 meter. **Height Loss:** 206 meter.

Max Height: 198 meter. **Min Height:** 126 meter.

Surface: Moderate. Mostly on tarred surfaces on minor roads or good tracks. The section between Waypoints 10 and 11 is overgrown and appears not to be maintained. In summer the grass is high.

Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent.

Difficulty: Medium.

Dog Friendly: Yes, on lead on public roads and near farm animals.

Refreshments: Options in Keith. We can recommend the Boogie Woogie Cafe in Regent Square at the the start/end of the walk.



Description

This is an enjoyable rural walk in the valley of the River Isla to the south-west of Keith. Much of the route is on the flanks of the low hills that surround the Strath so there are often wide-open countryside views to appreciate. The walk starts and ends at Regent Square in Fife-Keith, to the west of the main centre of modern-day Keith ("New Keith", itself established as a "new town" in 1750). The Earl of Fife, developed Fife-Keith in 1817 as a planned settlement to support a growing agricultural and textiles local economy. It was set out in a formal arrangement around a central point at Regent Square. It was originally going to be named Waterloo (after the battle)! This patriotic flourish in nomenclature was not sustained, although street names such as Regent Street, Wellington and Nelson Terraces, Victoria Place and Alexandria Road make reference to jingoistic glories. Initially, the route descends to the Auld Brig over the River Isla, at the heart of the original "Old Keith", established around 700 AD. Around this time the Monks of St. Maelrubha arrived from Applecross to build a chapel called Kethmal Ruf and today a latinised version of the name lives on in the Church of St Rufus. The River Isla could be forded by cattle at Old Keith and this gave rise to the "Great Simmareve Fair", predecessor of today's Keith Show, when traders from Glasgow to Orkney congregated in Keith for the sale of black cattle and horses. The Auld Brig of Keith was built in 1609 and is one of the oldest bridges still in use in Scotland. Daniel Defoe crossed it in 1706 and declared it "a fine bridge". Next stop on the route is the Strathmill Distillery, originally an 18thC corn-mill which, today, contributes its malt whisky output to the J&B Blend. Much of the remaining outward route follows the Old Toll Road to Dufftown before we turn back at Mill of Towie, a fully restored (but not operational) A-listed early-mid 19thC mill with an elegant pagoda-louvred cupola to the kiln.



Waypoints

(1) Start the walk in Regent Square

(57.54462; -2.96122)

Start the walk in Regent Square, Fife-Keith. There is an information board on the rear wall of the public toilets to check out. Now, facing the main road, turn right and walk down the pavement towards the bottom of the hill.



(2) Right down steps to cross the Auld Brig

(57.54373; -2.95758)

After 240 m, go right and down the steps to cross the Auld Brig. This fine hump-back bridge was first erected in 1609. After crossing the bridge, go left on the walkway alongside the River Isla, then, very soon, go right and gently uphill, with the old cemetery on your right side. Look out for a couple of interesting information plaques on the walls of the cemetery. (240 m)



(3) Veer right then left after cemetery

(57.54250; -2.95770)

In 200 m, at the top of the hill, with the cemetery wall still on your right side, veer right down an access road, then quickly veer left to follow an access road past houses that winds its way down to the Strathmill Distillery. (427 m)



(4) Pass distillery barrier then right-left for bridge

(57.54020; -2.96116)

In 350 m, with the old railway line behind you, pass a barrier for the Strathmill Distillery and follow the right of way sign right, then left past distillery buildings. Cross the bridge over the River Isla and go left. Ignore the Scottish Water access straight ahead and take the stepped path uphill on your right. Keep following the path uphill to the top of the hill. (768 m)



(5) Left at top of hill to follow Nelson Terrace

(57.54014; -2.96409)

After 250 m, at the top of the hill, the path meets a t-junction with Nelson Terrace. Go left here along the pavement, to follow Nelson Terrace as it eventually sweeps round to the right to meet Fife Street. (1 km)



(6) Left along Fife Street

(57.53893; -2.96728)

In 300 m, at a t-junction with Fife Street, go left along the pavement. (1.3 km)



(7) Left off Fife Street

(57.53793; -2.96896)

After 200 m, go left off Fife Street to follow the signed path for Braehead. You will notice that the modern cottages across the road on Fife Street are called 'Toll Cottages'. We believe that the path you are now about to follow (and until Waypoint 14) is the old toll road between Keith and Dufftown, now replaced by the modern B9104 (Fife Street). Carry on down the track, ignoring a farm access road on you left as you approach the River Isla again. (1.5 km)



(8) Cross footbridge then left up to Braehead

(57.53212; -2.96617)

In 700 m, the track veers towards the river where you cross a footbridge by an old ford. Once across the bridge, go left to take the track uphill, passing the aptly named Braehead Farm as you gain the higher ground. (2.2 km)



(9) Go right towards Auchindachy

(57.53054; -2.96323)

In 300 m, after passing Braehead Farm on your left, go right to follow the walks signpost for Auchindachy. You now have a fairly long stretch (1.7 km) of walking on this very quiet tarred road, passing the large Coldhome Farm along the way. (2.5 km)



(10) Veer left off tarred road at corner to carry straight on

(57.52057; -2.98428)

In 1.7 km, at a point where the tarred road goes sharp right and downhill by some houses, carry on straight ahead to follow the line of the old toll road, on the signed route for Auchindachy. Soon, with a large modern house on your right side, you will arrive at a gate with a pedestrian access lever/bolt mechanism. Go through the gate and follow this old track downhill, with fields on both sides. In summer time this section of the route is badly overgrown (our experience in July 2019). Be prepared to wade through long grass for about 700 m, following an indistinct path. After rain, the grass will be wet so walking trousers/gaiters are recommended. At the end of this section, go through the gate at the other end and walk down to the B9014 road. (4.2 km)



(11) Left along verge of B9014

(57.51520; -2.99157)

In 700 m, upon meeting the B9014 road to Dufftown, cross the road and go left along the verge of the road, taking great care to stay clear of passing traffic. (4.9 km)



(12) Veer left down to Mill of Towie

(57.51237; -2.99127)

In 300 m, after crossing the bridge over the River Isla, go left down the access road to Mill of Towie. (5.2 km)



(13) Mill of Towie

(57.51157; -2.99061)

In 150 m, or so, you will arrive at the Mill of Towie* buildings. After taking in the scene, re-trace your steps back to the main road and turn left over the rail bridge, looking for a signed road almost immediately on your right. (5.35 km)

**Note: An A-listed early-mid 19th century mill complex with later additions and alterations. It is built on the site of an earlier mill. There is a paddle wheel, a mill dam and lade. There is a pagoda louvered cupola to the kiln. Inside, the machinery is intact. The mill and kiln were fully restored in 1987-88, and is in working order (although not operational as at 2019). For more info see: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?tab=main&refno=NJ44NW0008>*



(14) Right onto minor road off B9014 after railway bridge

(57.51208; -2.99172)

In just over 150 m, from the Mill of Towie, and after returning to the B9014 road and crossing the railway bridge, take the signed route on your right for Maisley. (5.5 km)



(15) Sharp right to continue following the minor road

(57.51162; -3.00073)

In 600 m, after the road passes through a mature pine wood, follow the tarred road as it goes sharp right at a junction with a rough access road. In this section you will be passing the Broadfield Woodland Creation Scheme with areas for tree-planting on both sides of the road. There is also a long section of high Hawthorn hedging on your right side. (6.1 km)



(16) Veer left off minor road to follow signed track

(57.52649; -2.99281)

After 2.2 km, just after Cherry Tree Cottage, take the signed green track veering off the road to your left, by a bench. Now follow this track as it passes the large farm at Maisley on your left. At this point your route becomes a tarred access road for Maisley. Follow this tarred road all the way down to the B9014 road where you turn left to walk a short distance into the outskirts of Fife-Keith at Fife Street (where you passed earlier in the walk). Keep following Fife Street back to your start-point at Regent Square. (8.3 km)



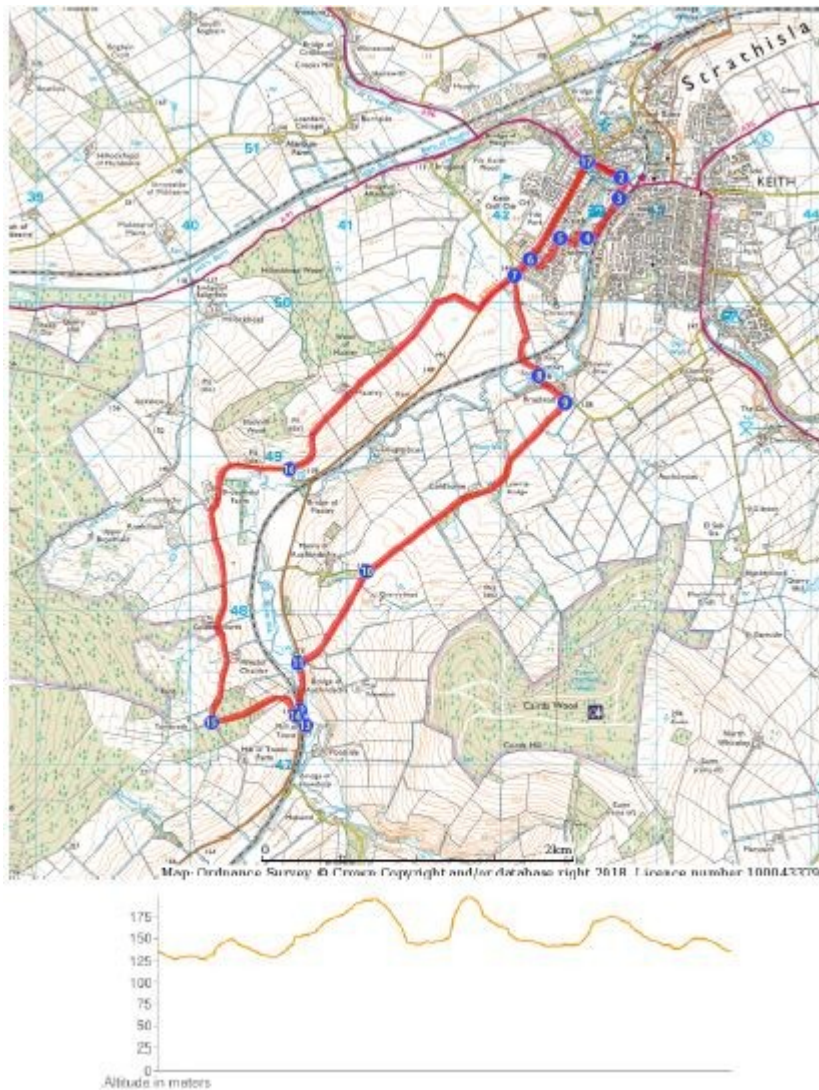
(17) Finish the walk back at Regent Square

(57.54463; -2.96137)

After 2.9 km you will arrived back at Regent Square in Fife-Keith where you started the walk. Note the fine old Georgian house, Regent House, across the main road. (11.2 km)



Route Map



Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

[Access Walk on OutdoorActive](#)

[Access Walk on OSMaps](#)

[Access Walk on AllTrails](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)